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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine practices of methods that secondary school history teachers could use to help their students master special skills needed for effectively reading and comprehending printed materials in their classes. Since a range of eighth grade levels of reading achievement may be presented in a history class which uses a common textbook, a need for awareness of reading skills on the part of the teacher is indicated. Sixty-four experienced history teachers who had also received advanced training in the teaching of reading were asked what practices or methods they would consider useful for other secondary history teachers to use. Some of the approaches listed as most effective were: help students learn special vocuabulary; be specific when making assignments; give instruction in how to find and use needed reference materials; teach students how to read for the main ideas, supporting details, and different points of view; teach students how to use different parts of textbooks effectively; give specific purpose for reading assignments; teach students to evaluate what they read; use additional source materials; and determine reading level of students and readability level of the text. (MKM)

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SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOL HISTORY TEACHERS' SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING EFFECTIVELY THE SPECIAL READING SKILLS NEEDED IN THE STUDY OF HISTORY

By E. Dale Davis

The purpose of this study was to determine practices or methods that secondary school history teachers could use to help their students master special skills needed for effectively reading and comprehending printed materials in their classes.

It was the author's hypothesis that capable, experienced history teachers who had also received advanced training in the teaching of reading could suggest specific practices or methods which would be worthy of consideration by other history teachers teaching in secondary schools.

Significance of the Problem

In many school systems reading instruction in the elementary grades is the only training received by most students. The instructional program generally places emphasis on the reading of narrative or simple factual materials, and it is often terminated at the end of the fourth or sixth grade. Beyond the elementary school level, training in how to read is mostly optional and dependent upon the individual teacher's recognition of his students' needs. For that reason

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there are many students in the secondary school history classes who have had little, if any, instruction in the reading skills needed for effective reading and study in this subject area of the curriculum.[1] Yet the students are required to study history.

Many reading specialists state that it is safe to estimate that within a world history class at the tenth-grade level, in a class where I. Q.'s often range from 85 to 140 and where the average age is 16, there will probably be eight grade levels of reading ability represented in that class. The teacher is confronted with the challenge of teaching these students history often with only one textbook and a limited amount of reference material. Thus, since most learning in secondary school history classrooms is through the use of textbooks, reading skills become the "common denominator" of learning in such classrooms.[2] Herber points out that many high school students have difficulty in history, not necessarily because they are unable to read, but because they do not have the skills essential for reading effectively in that content area.[3]

Definitions and Limitations

There are no unusual terms used in this study, but for the sake of clarity the following commonplace ones are defined.

Methods.--The term methods is used in this study to describe what the teacher of history can do to influence the effectiveness of learning on the part of students--especially the learning of reading skills in history classes.

Secondary school history teacher.--A person who teaches history in a middle school, a junior high school, or a high

school is a secondary school history teacher.

History class.--In this study history class means a class in United States history or world history taught in a secondary school in one of the grades eight through twelve.

This report is part of a study which was conducted in the fall of 1975 by the author using a research grant given to him by Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas. The study was limited to 64 teachers interviewed and to certain printed materials found in Fondren Library on the Southern Methodist University campus, the Dallas Public Library, and the library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Resume of Related Literature

Since this study was concerned primarily with the ideas and practices of the selected teachers being studied, only a brief summary of some of the more pertinent research of outstanding educators in the field of reading will be presented.

As was mentioned above, in many school systems basal reading instruction is the only training given to most students; yet, educators in the better secondary schools realize reading can no longer be considered just an elementary school subject.[4] Thus a majority of secondary schools accredited by regional accrediting associations are offering developmental reading programs for their students, in addition to corrective and remedial programs as needed. At the same time, these schools are demanding that the various content area teachers provide instruction and practice in the reading skills required for success in each subject area. Even the secondary school students who have been exposed to sound reading instruction in the elementary school need

additional help in the refinement of reading skills.[5]

It is often the student's reading ability which ultimately will be the crucial factor to his success or failure in school. Every teacher in every content area classroom is dealing with materials the student must read. Therefore, each history teacher is an instructor of reading materials and has many opportunities to help students who are reading the required and recommended printed materials in his course.

In the past many history teachers either felt unable to help in the area of reading instruction or that it was not their responsibility. Fortunately, many of them now believe that they can and must help students with the reading skills needed in their classrooms, and they attempt to make reading instruction an integral part of their teaching.[6]

Ruth Strang believed that even proficiency in general reading skills was not enough for success in history classes. She pointed out on many occasions that students needed a technical vocabulary and special skills in each of the content areas.[7] This, of course, does not mean that the history teacher is to abandon his major responsibility which is to help students learn the content of the particular course he is teaching. On the other hand, to teach content effectively, the teacher must be aware of the varying needs and abilities of his students and provide instruction in the reading skills which are demanded by the content.

Marksheffel points out that every history teacher must accept the responsibility of aiding students with the problems they encounter in textbook reading.[8] While special reading teachers might provide some assistance, the responsibility

for helping students read materials in the content areas should not be delegated to the reading specialist. With few exceptions the subject matter teacher is the best qualified individual for giving reading instruction in history classes.[9] This is true because through his interest, preparation, and education he is an expert or specialist in his field. It is he who has acquired the background in the vocabulary, concepts, and generalizations which is necessary for intelligent instruction in the subject. The history teacher should be the most capable of helping students learn to understand new concepts, to master new terminology, and to determine the crucial parts of material which require slow, thoughtful reading and those areas which need only skimming or a rapid reading.[10]

Research studies and reading specialists have set forth many strategies for improving the reading skills of students in secondary school history classes. The following are some of the ones most often stressed:

1. Help students master skills in locating, evaluating, and using information and make certain that reading materials are appropriate for the different reading levels of the students.[11]

2. Provide knowledge of and practice in using the different parts of the history texts.[12]

3. Teach students how to use the SQ3R (survey, question, read, recall, and review) method.[13]

4. Teach pupils how to detect, understand, and retain major ideas and relevant details.[14]

5. Take time to help students acquire an understanding

of concepts of time and space, the chronology of eras and events, the relationships between past and present, and cause-effect relationships.[15]

6. Group students in the classroom and differentiate instruction. Provide differentiated material when necessary.[16]

7. When possible, help students learn to use ideas and information to solve problems in history, analyze documents, and understand major movements.[17]

8. Enhance the understanding and retention of ideas and concepts encountered when reading materials in history by setting definite purposes to be achieved by reading; for example, reading to answer questions, to find specific details, to evaluate a particular statement, or to determine the general significance of an article. Teach students to apply the higher level critical reading skills when reading materials in history.[18]

9. Help students gain knowledge and skill in the use of charts, tables, graphs, maps, globes, and other pictorial or graphic presentations for aid in acquiring an understanding of social studies concepts.[19]

10. Help students learn to discriminate between fact and opinion and to choose valid conclusions and make sound inferences and generalizations.[20]

11. Help students learn to deal with lengthy complex sentences in paragraphs which are packed with concepts.[21]

Research Procedures

The research plan used in this study involved the following steps:

1. A brief survey of the recent literature dealing

with the teaching of special reading skills needed in secondary school history classes.

2. Interviews with 64 history teachers who had taught at least three years in a secondary school and who had also taken at least one graduate level course in the teaching of reading.

During the course of the interview the teachers were asked to complete the following short questionnaire or to complete it at their convenience and mail it to the author. Forty-one of the 64 teachers completed the questionnaire during the interview.

THE SECONDARY SCHOOL HISTORY TEACHER'S ROLE IN TEACHING EFFECTIVELY THE SPECIAL READING SKILLS NEEDED IN THE STUDY OF HISTORY

1. Name of your school system_____

2. Your Sex: Male____ Female____

3. Number of years you have taught in secondary schools_____

4. Highest degree held_____

5. Have you completed one or more courses in reading at the graduate level? Yes____ No____

6. Do you have a master's degree in reading? Yes___ No___

7. Are you certified as a reading teacher? Yes___ No___

8. Are you now enrolled in a reading specialist program? Yes____ No____

9. If you have a master's degree in an area other than reading, please state the area_____.

10. Do you feel it is the responsibility of the history teacher to know and to teach to his students the special reading skills needed in effectively studying history? Yes___ No___

11. If your answer was no to number 10, would you please

state why you feel this way on the first blank page attached to this questionnaire? If your answer was yes, would you take a few minutes and state on the first and second blank pages the most effective approaches or methods you believe that history teachers can use to teach the special reading skills needed in their classes? Try to list at least five promising methods, but do not list over 10.

The 64 teachers responding to the questionnaire were from the following school systems:

Dallas, Texas	9	Norman, Oklahoma	2
El Paso, Texas	4	Oklahoma City, Okla.	4
Fort Worth, Texas	6	Atlanta, Georgia	7
Garland, Texas	4	Augusta, Georgia	2
Grand Prairie, Texas	4	Columbia, S. C.	4
Houston, Texas	6	Raleigh, N. C.	4
San Antonio, Texas	5	Durham, N. C.	3

Analysis of Data

Analysis of data taken from the questionnaires revealed the following information. There were 21 males and 43 females in the population studied. The mean number of years of teaching experience in secondary schools for the teachers responding was 8.3 years. Fifty-three of the teachers indicated they held a master's degree, and 11 stated they had a bachelor's degree. All of the teachers studied had completed at least one graduate level course in reading. Fourteen of the teachers studied indicated they were certified to teach reading. Nine of the females and one of the males had a master's degree in reading. Eleven of the teachers indicated they were now enrolled in reading programs leading to certi-

fication as a reading specialist. Five of these already held a master's degree. Fifteen of the teachers had a master's degree in history, three in government, eight in social studies, and 17 in secondary education.

All of the teachers studied checked the yes blank to the question: Do you feel that it is the responsibility of the history teacher to know and to teach the special reading skills needed to study history effectively? This is not surprising since the researcher studied only teachers who had been recommended for the study by either a school consultant or a principal as a person who was an "outstanding" teacher and who had taken at least one course in reading at the graduate level. The major purpose of the study demanded these qualifications.

Question number 11 asked the teachers to state the most effective approaches or methods they believed the secondary school history teacher can use to teach the special reading skills needed in their classes.

The ten approaches most often stated are given below. The exact wording of each response was carefully studied, classified, and then summarized into a general statement which would convey the meaning of the various responses even though the verbatim wording of each teacher's statements could not, of course, be given here. Three certified reading specialists who had also taught history in a secondary school for four or more years helped the author classify and summarize the responses. Number one was listed the greatest number of times; number two was the next most frequently stated on through number 10:

The results were as follows:

1. Help students learn the special vocabulary in history and the technical terminology. Explain new words and concepts introduced in new chapters and units--listed 63 times.

2. Be very specific when making assignments. Give students instructions in how to find and use reference materials needed to complete assignments--60 times.

3. Teach students how to read for the main ideas, supporting details, different points of view, and to identify causes--57 times.

4. Teach students how to use a textbook effectively. Introduce them to the text early in the school year and provide knowledge of and practice in using the different parts of the book--53 times.

5. Give students specific purposes for reading assignments. Help students acquire skills in locating, using, and evaluating information for specific purposes--50 times.

6. Teach students to evaluate what they read, to differentiate between factual and editorial writing, and to identify false generalizations and distortions of truth--48 times.

7. Make sure the course is not restricted to a single textbook. Encourage students to read pertinent materials related to major topics--44 times.

8. Help pupils become efficient in critical reading by providing practice in identifying bias, prejudice, and propaganda techniques--41 times.

9. Determine the reading level of your students and

of the textbooks you are using. Provide plenty of materials for students who read below grade level and for those who read on and above the grade level--33 times.

10. Help students acquire an understanding of the relationships between past and present and cause-effect relationships--26 times.

Summary and Recommendations

The survey of related recent literature on teaching reading skills needed in the study of history at the secondary level and the results of this researcher's interviews with selected history teachers and analysis of the responses to the questionnaire used in this study seem to verify the following:

1. Literature on the topic definitely indicates that the secondary school history teacher has responsibilities in teaching developmental reading.

2. The teachers who participated in this study all indicated they felt that teaching special reading skills in history classes should be an area of concern for teachers.

3. The related literature and the results of the interviews are surprisingly similar in that the most effective ways for teaching the special reading skills needed in secondary school history classes revolve around the following:

a. Teach students to grasp and retain main ideas and relevant details.

b. Teach students to use textbooks and references effectively.

c. Help students master special vocabulary, terminology, and new concepts.

d. Teach students to read critically.

e. Help students set specific purposes for reading.

f. Provide materials which are appropriate for the specific history course and for the students' reading level.

The author believes his hypothesis, that capable, experienced teachers who had also received advanced training in the teaching of reading could suggest specific practices or methods which would be worthy of consideration by other history teachers working in secondary schools, was verified in this particular study with the specific teachers involved.

It is the author's opinion and recommendation that further study be done by others on this topic with other secondary school teachers in different geographic areas.

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